



Research Paper

Tamarind Tree: A Silent Witness Of Human Conflicts From Sundara Ramaswamy's *The Tamarind Tree*.

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ABSTRACT

In literature, creators and authors created millions of unimaginable characters in their stories and movies. Almost, humans, animals, insects, mountains, soil, plants, tress, pre historic animas and even aliens incarnated as fictional characters. When animals talk like humans those works are known as fables like C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* (1950). Some fictions are constructed with real life common characters along with tress, animals and insects as they exist in reality. The concept of loyalty and love have been shown in many novels and movies through the pet animals. The value of nature and natural resources has been shown in many novel and disaster movies. In Tamil novel category, very few writers utilized their native village, the people of those villages and the other silent characters such as the common pond, banyan trees, minor gods, distant mountains, and their fertile lands. Writer Sundara Ramaswamy's first work *Oru Puliyamarathin Kathai* (1966) which was translated into English by few authors such as Black Wentworth and published. They have been published under various titles *Tamarind History* and *The Tamarind Tree*. This story projects the ideology of Anthropocene a little bit but mostly talks about the essence of human behavior over ego, domination, selfishness, compassion, pity and buried memories. So this paper focuses on how the dumb tree becomes the potential symbol of all the events and activities which happens around it in the village. Through the presence of this silent witness, author Sundara Ramaswamy narrates the story to the readers. Readers could distinguish the good hearted and stone hearted characters through the way how the common people handle the tree. Thus this tree exists as a silent witness of this novel to reveal the never ending human conflicts. In 1960s, this way of narration was new to the Tamil literature world. This story starts through the flash back narration of Damodara Asan about the events happened in British period and later the story continues with Ali and Thammu.

Key words: Tamarind Tree, Silent witness, Ecology, Human conflicts, Sundara Ramaswamy.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Sundara Ramaswamy was born in the year 1931. He passed away in the year 2005. In his era, he was a unique writer among other Tamil novel writers like Thi. Janakiraman. Like many writer he has also contributed his creations under fictions, short stories, poetry and plays also. Apart from *The Tamarind Tree*, he is well known for his other works *Children, Women, Men* and *Waves*. They are the translated works from Tamil. His first work *Oru Puliyamarathin Kathai* was published in 1966. This was the complete version of the novel. This novel opens about the explanation of the location of the famous tamarind tree. According to this novel, his story and events are fictional, but critics claim this story could be written based on Nagarcoil. As per the plot, it was under the state of Travancore. At present it is now Kanniyakumari district. Since the author's hometown in Nagarcoil, this story shows the condition of Nagarcoil before and after the British era. Apart from this, through the rise and fall of the tamarind tree and the surrounding road, pond and the junction, author passes the greediness of humans against fellow humans and nature. Finally the tamarind tree is poisoned due to their ego and it becomes an example of man's never ending thirsty. From the opening chapter of this novel, the tamarind is targeted by the local people for many reasons. Author develops the fear of losing the tamarind tree towards the last chapter. Finally the evil desires of fellow humans swallow the beautiful tamarind tree. This is like an example of modernization where the native culture is erased and modernized materials are installed. Outside of this novel, we shall understand that this novel was way ahead that talked about urban deforestation. In the form of urbanization along with the greediness of local merchants, the dumb tree was poisoned. This is how the urbanization is made against nature. In another

perspective, the death of the tamarind tree can be taken as a kind of vandalism. Trees are mostly celebrated in India in many ceremonies and rituals. Behind the enlightenment of Buddha, the peepal tree had a vital role. In Hindu religion, most of the temples have their own sacred tree that is called as 'sthala viruksha'. Like that, the early generation of the fictional town treated the tree with special attention. In the opening chapter it is registered through Koplán character who tried to cut the tree at midnight. Damodara Asan is characterized as a representative of the tree. His memories about the incidents happened in the town was stitched around the trunk of the tamarind tree. He brought the readers to sit under the tree like the school boys who were listening the stories of Damodara Asan. Chellathayi's suicide was the first incident in the story that triggered Koplán to cut down the tree. This conflict against the tamarind tree grows till the last chapter. The personal vengeance of Ali, Thammu and many more characters gradually build a hidden politics around the tree. Like the powerless working class people against the power centre, this tamarind is left as a silent witness of all human conflicts.

TAMARIND TREE AS A SILENT WITNESS

In chapter one, Author describes about the location of the tamarind tree at present according to the story. Author initially registers the role of this tree related to this town as a silent observer.

The tree had nothing to do with what happened around it, or under its shade. It was only a mute witness to the actions of the people who sought its shelter, witness their goodness, to their folly, to tears and laughter, to selfishness and sacrifice, to jealousy, to love turned to hate. (Ramaswamy 1).

This is how tamarind tree is introduced in Chapter one. After that the second person narrator talks about Damodara Asan. From present time, this character brings the history of that town and the tamarind tree through the stories told by Asan. In this flash back, the first conflict rises between Koplán and an unknown man who molested Chellathayi. Instead of taking revenge against that unknown man, Koplán foolishly tries to apply his revenge against the tamarind tree where Chellathayi committed suicide. Tamarind only knows the secret relationship of Chellathayi and the unknown man. It was so silent when she tied rope around her neck. Damodara Asan establishes that he was the reason behind saving the tree from cutting down. After her death, Koplán is caught red handed when he tried to cut down the tree, during the argument Asan also expressed his wish about cutting the tree. "I have been planning all day to cut down this tree, and looking for an appropriate time to do so, and now you show up at the same moment. Was this the auspicious moment you were looking for also?" I countered. (Ramaswamy 21). All these statements are not to kill the tree but to save it from the anger of Koplán. He manipulated his anger towards a superstition and finally ended him to cut the pieces from the branch where Chellathayi hanged herself. This is the first attempt that the tree was saved from the personal conflicts of Koplán. At the end of pacification, Asan proceeds his statement about this tree such as,

It is good to good people, and bad to the bad ones. If you try to meddle with it, it will tear you to pieces. The evil tree is here just to destroy Kizhacheri and raze it to the ground. Chellathayi was a sacrifice to its anger. But often anger goes along with sympathy. The god would have torn you to bits. You have escaped with your life. (Ramaswamy 25).

Throughout the story gradually the tamarind tree is getting centre of attraction more than any other characters in this novel. Under British period, the surrounding areas around the tree started to wear a new face in the name of development. This reflects the present era urbanization in the name of development. The so called unknown narrator describes the early improvement happened in tamarind tree junction.

As time passes, loaded carts began using road in front of the tamarind tree day and night. ... The place also became the parking ground at night for the passenger buffalo carts. When buses started operating, the mound was converted into a bus stand. Shops started springing up around the bus stand, as did a couple of restaurants. In the course of time the area became a junction. (Ramaswamy 41).

This is how the tamarind tree became *Sui Generis* of the town. The tree did not take any responsibility for these things happened around it. It was standing for ages as a silent witness of everything like without taking any part of issues, developments and memories of local people. Where there is a growth, there would be some price to be given as a compensation. The consumption of memories has some limitation. Like this, the development was waiting to take the life of this silent creature. That tree came under the control of municipality, fruits of the tree were given through auction sales. Shops, grocery stores, cinema theatre, hotels, and residents started to emerge around this tamarind tree junction. Even telephone lines were installed in this town. It all happened under the shadow of this tamarind tree. Such an unrecognizable change. Conflict never occurs among the branches of a single tree but it is not applicable for common men. Moothapillai and Ali Saheb were the competitor in the auction. Every year to save his pride, Moothapillai wins the auction. Unfortunately, a day in tamarind tree's life came without a single fruit that cancelled the auction. This is the first conflict rose against the silent tamarind tree. Moothapillai's complaint turned the attention of municipality. Pillai tried to bring a solution to this issue by making an inquiry committee. Like a sleeping baby, the tamarind tree was standing at the junction without any worries.

Ramaswamy's narration about this auction portion didn't continue towards the end of this novel. The remaining chapters started to talk about a huge conflict of Kadhar and Damu. Ramaswamy gradually narrates the

life history of Kadhar who grew from rags to rich. At the age of eleven, he left his house and worked in many places. Almost when he reached his teen age, he joined in Vinnayagam Pillai's textile shop. Gopala ayyar who returned from military started his own textile shop near tamarind tree junction. This part of this fiction focuses mostly on the double standard of humans through Kadhar character. At first his conflict happens against Pillai and later his cunningness takes the peace of Gopala ayyar also. Kadhar's character is like a money minded personality. There is no place for loyalty in his heart. That's why, he moved from Pillai's shop and gradually occupied Gopala ayyar's shop and later he became the owner of Ayyar's shop. Capitals and Kadhar was explained as another conflict in this novel. Actually, Kadhar's personal frustration in his family turned him as a man who desires for money. So that he sucked Gopala ayyar's business and took his textile shop by cheating. "Abdul Kadhar was now a proprietor. His goal had been attained. It stuck him all over again that leaving Vallinayagam Pillai and joining Gopala Iyer was the wisest thing he could have done. He kept marvelling at his own foresight and keen intelligence." (Ramaswamy 111). Many shops and many owners. Like the wheel of time, owners and labourers were changing their role like a music chair competition. But the tamarind tree was intact.

In a parallel track, author tells the story of Damu and his brothers. They are running a shop in the tamarind tree junction. Their growth and family background is completely different from Kadhar's story. However, from chapter ten onwards, author indirectly hints a new conflict which is about to rise between these two capitalists, and finally it takes the life of the tamarind tree. After Kadhar became a successful merchant in cigarette business, many traders approached him to purchase bulk orders. Meanwhile, Damu brought a person Arumugam with a recommendation to give orders. But Kadhar did not turn his attention. This is where their personal conflict starts. "Revenge refers to a desirable aggressive reaction in response to a harmful action" (Schumann & Ross, 2010). Their enmity developed and gave birth a space for ego. Tamarind tree area junction comes under ward thirteen and fourteen. Damu applied as a contestant in that Municipal election also against the president Joseph. So Kadhar was triggered by *Travancore Nesan* reporter and applied as an opponent in that election. Their ego in the politics became a huge vengeance which is equal to destroy each other. Damu's shop is running successfully not because of his products but because of the tamarind tree's shadow. Kadhar had a decision to remove that tree to down Damu's business. "Individuals seeking justice often believe that revenge will be a positive experience with the goal of bringing about catharsis toward an angering event" (Bushman, 2002; Chester & DeWall, 2017; Chester, Merwin, & DeWall, 2015). This is how the evil conflict of humans was waiting to take the life of that silent witness. Poor tree was unaware of anything which happens around it. Both of them were trying many strategies to win the election. At the same time, Kadhar was taking legal steps to remove the tamarind tree in municipal office. The tree was counting its days.

DEATH OF THE SILENT WITNESS

In Chapter 14, Author prophesies the death of the tamarind tree. Municipal members cast their vote and the final counting was against the life of the tree. Three leading votes turned the situation negative and the council accepted the decision against the silent witness. It all happened because of personal ego and politics. "In Freudian terms, ego refers to the conscious part of personality that experiences and reacts to the real world as it mediates between the drives of the id and the demands of the superego." (Leary, Mark R., et al. pp 152-153). The abstract version of Kadhar's ego took an image in the form of municipal order. Isakki the reporter of *Travancore Nesan*, turned the support of local people against the existence of that tamarind tree. He poisoned the actual history of the town and projected the tamarind tree as the tree of evil and ill-luck. In this condition also, it was remaining silent and observing the actions.

He retold eloquently the tragic story of Chellathayi hanging herself from the tree, adding all sorts of frills to it. He pointed out its dry barks and rotten leaves falling into the tank gave the water a bad smell. Giving a new twist to an old story, he pointed out that the stench from the tank was so bad that it had once ruined the procession of Maharaja Puram Thirunal. (Ramaswamy 165).

At last, coolie Ayyapan became the evil force to erase the tamarind tree and its related memories. As per the plan of Kadhar, before the election, he poured mercury based poison at one p.m. midnight. Unfortunately, he was caught red handed and stabbed by Damu's election workers. As a result, Kadhar and Damu were arrested. The town was like a widow without the green tamarind tree. Finally it lost its life and the hundred year history of this town was buried along with this tree.

II. CONCLUSION

Sundara Ramaswamy describes the death of the tamarind tree with a great taste of tragic. Readers' hearts are squeezed by the text and it makes the readers feel that they lost one of their family members.

Large numbers of the leaves had fallen down. The lower branches were completely bare. In the next two or three days, the tree was completely shorn of leaves and branches. A well-known physician checked the tree on the fourth day, peeled a bit of the bark and looked, noticed that the sap was not flowing, and declared the tree dead. (Ramaswamy 181).

Ramaswamy turned the unknown tamarind tree as immortal through his words. The silent and innocent tree became the scapegoat in order to satisfy the ego of two brutes. However the scarification won the history of that town. From the pre-British period to present, people of the town would always call the area as the tamarind tree junction whether it exists or not. In the pages of town's history along with the tamarind tree, its death is also registered.

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